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SUBJECT: ISRAEL SPACE AGENCY HAS HIGH AMBITIONS

¶1. (SBU) Post ESTOff met with Zvi Kaplan, Director General of the Israel Space Agency (ISA), on August 25, who outlined an ambitious agenda for Israel in space sciences, and in particular for the ISA's showcase conference in January. This message is background and heads-up for likely engagement by the Department and Post on these issues in coming months.

¶2. (SBU) During the meeting, Kaplan provided a copy of his letter to NASA Administrator Charles Bolden, sent August 5, inviting him to be the keynote speaker at the Fifth Ilan Ramon International Space Conference to be held near Tel Aviv January 27-29, 2010. (Ramon was the Israeli astronaut who died on the space shuttle Columbia in 2003 along with the American crew.) This annual conference organized by the Fisher Institute of Air & Space Studies, the ISA and corporate sponsors, convenes leaders in spaces sciences from business, academia and government with a focus on policy, new technology, and science education. USG attendance in previous years has usually included several NASA scientists and an astronaut or two; last year Pete Worden, head of NASA Ames Research Center attended, and post understands he is inclined to return this year. Post supports the invitation to Bolden, and encourages a strong NASA delegation for the conference.

¶3. (SBU) The ISA DG also outlined other ambitions for Israel's space program. As he has already voiced to NASA, Kaplan wants to see another Israeli astronaut participating in the manned flight program. He acknowledged that NASA's manned flight program faced an uncertain future given the constrained NASA budget, and that the USG had several major decisions to make regarding the Agency's future priorities. Nonetheless, manned flight is what focuses public attention and motivates students to go into science, and he wants Israel to be part of it, even if it is a decade down the road. Second, Kaplan hopes that Israel can participate in NASA's Lunar Science Institute. He understands that Korea and Canada are already cooperating with the NLSI. Although Israel's Space Agency is a small body that coordinates and promotes Israel's academic and business space science capabilities, and unlike NASA operates no labs of its own, ISA plays a role in fostering greater interaction between Israeli and foreign researchers.

¶4. (SBU) Third, the ISA is working with private sector consortia preparing a proposal for the Discovery Mission solicitation regarding mapping Venus. Israel has proven expertise in small payload systems design, and has good value-added to contribute in mapping missions. (Comment: Israel also hopes to use this type of high visibility project to promote sales of Israeli technology applications overseas.)

¶5. (SBU) Kaplan's ultimate goal is to have a bilateral space science cooperation agreement between the US and Israel. Although ISA is a small counterpart compared to NASA, he believes Israel's prowess in high technology fields makes it a desirable partner in research-dependent fields such as space science. Kaplan says Israel has a bilateral cooperation agreement on space research in place with France, and expects this November to sign one with Italy. Discussions are also proceeding with Russia on a space science

cooperation agreement, but it is unlikely to be ready in time for a planned visit by Putin to Israel in October.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Post is aware of Israeli ongoing participation in NASA's ECHO project, but agrees there is no large, bilateral framework for exchange and cooperation in space sciences. NASA's favorable impressions from last year's Ramon Conference visit, during which time the delegation had considerable contact with Israeli industry and academia, indicate that such an agreement may merit serious consideration.

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